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MELROSE 2-7681

Jan. 31, 1957

Dear Dr. Swan:

The limitations of language will make this letter inadequate, but within those limitations Phyllis and I wish to express our feelings to you. Little Robert's progress in the past two weeks has been little short of the miraculous. After living with the tragedy of a stricken child for nearly three years, feeling miserable and utterly helpless as each successive episode of hypoxia struck him, how can we express ourselves to his deliverer?

We had to watch him suddenly become cyanotic, cry out with pain or silently stagger. If we were not alert to catch him, he would fall, whimpering, dyspneic, and pitiful as he drew up his thin little knees. Holding him was to convince ourselves that we could help; we reassured him when we were not reassured; we prayed that each episode would terminate quickly and without tragedy.

As the months went by and his exercise tolerance diminished, we told ourselves that the setback would be temporary. At times his color seemed almost good to us, an illusion shattered if his healthy little sister toddled up and put her pink cheek near his ashen one. When we fearfully took him to see Gil in December, it was only too clear that the time for surgical intervention was approaching. We eagerly agreed to observe him further, then dutifully made an appointment for six months. Gil's kind, capable manner was reassuring; he knew we'd call soon, and he eased the burden tremendously by letting us know he'd be there when we did.

The two weeks between the phone call and the hospital admission went by slowly. At first we feared we'd be too late. Then, as Robert showed minimal improvement, we questioned the wisdom of the decision. We knew he would be lost to us soon without operation; he deserved that chance, even if it failed. God had blessed us with a lovable little boy for nearly three years and, if it were now His decision to send for that boy, we must understand and be grateful. The last day in the Springs we took a full roll of movie film of Robert. Later we realized that, if all went well, we could not need it, but if anything went wrong, we could not bear looking at it.

En route to Denver we drove 40 mph, dawdling because we did not want to arrive. At the hospital we turned back to find a place to buy Robert a pair of slippers. Then we dragged ourselves through the hospital door and silently asked an obvious question.

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Our first reassurance was the way he, like other young patients, soon adjusted to the hospital. Our second, far more wonderful than the first, was to come face to face with the man in whose hands our son's life and much of our future was to be entrusted. Perhaps you were not aware of the impact on us when we met you that nite. The shadowy technician lurking behind the decisions of Gil Blount had assumed stature; a towering, friendly man whose superb skill had echoes from far beyond Colorado. One of my close friends, a thoracic surgeon in New York, on hearing that Henry Swan was to perform the operation, had written in glowing terms and asserted there wasn't a man in New York who could hold a candle to our surgeon. As this man took shape, a heavy burden fell from us. Previously we had relied on our faith; now we were permitted to see the instrument chosen to support that faith. For the first time in several weeks we slept soundly.

At 7:30 A.M. we guiltily rushed back to relieve our lonesome tot. When we approached his crib he was invisible behind a ring of squealing nurses playing with him. Sunny little Robert had made friends. Us he put in our places. "Hello, Mama and Daddy," he chirped, then turned back to his friends in white. Wednesday, the day before surgery, was an incredibly long day. We dreaded the inevitable CBC, typing, and penicillin which would indoctrinate him that all in white are not friends. We winced to hear his squeals of delight replaced by shrieks of anguish, however momentary and for whatever good purpose. Then we discovered the wheelchair, and so did Robert. We took turns covering the miles of corridor, and, finally, at 10:30 P.M. he fell exhausted to sleep. We stood by his little crib in the moonlight, both of us sobbing. We had our prayers and our respective faiths, but we felt helpless because it was our innocent little son sleeping there who had to undergo the ordeal. Eventually we left and tried to stay awake as late as possible to avoid being up before eight and visualizing his fright at the strange figures, the masks, the anesthesia, his crying in vain for parents who failed to come help him. We dreaded to think of cutdowns, incisions, rib retractors, things once so familiar and impersonal to both of us. It was 8:30 when I awoke to find that Phyllis had been up for three hours.

By 9:45 we huddled in the lobby with other frightened relatives. At 10:00 Gil reported that all was going well, the exposure complete, and the subclavian adequate. At 10:45 he told us you had completed the anastomosis and that closure was imminent. Then before 11:30 you walked into the lobby. When Phyllis saw your drawn and tired face she thought something had gone wrong. Later we realized how great was the anxiety and how fearful the strain placed upon the very human man who is

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asked to do the superhuman.

Our first glimpse of Robert was such a relief. He lay perfectly still under the oxygen tent clutching his familiar "baby". He did not seem to be in pain. But he was not the same. Robert, for the first time in his 33 months, was pink. His lips, his ears, his fingernails, so long cyanotic, were now, miraculously, thanks to the goodness of God and the wonderful skill of Dr. Henry Swan, almost ruby.

And now we're home again. Today, two weeks after operation, Robert appears to have forgotten his ordeal. He uses the left arm he first held stiffly. He glories in his new-found stamina. He who could not cross the room without squatting now races from room to room, vigorously shaking his head in denial if I ask if he is tired. His color remains excellent. Our little son's happy smile melts our hearts as each day we look at him and grin. And every day we give repeated thanks to God for his mercy in sparing our boy and to Dr. Henry Swan for being God's Instrument.

Gratefully,

Robert L. Zimmerman